

Artist statement regarding the reactions on the “Travelling light“

We are very surprised about the harsh reactions regarding the erecting of our sculpture “Travelling light“ in Calgary. We have been working on public art projects for over 20 years in many different locations all over the globe and are used to controversial receptions when a new work is installed. Nevertheless the intensity of the media and public reaction in this instance is new to us. We have executed several other public art works in Canada (i.e. Vancouver and Edmonton) but never faced this kind of reaction. It was and is not our intention to offend anybody. On the same hand, the reception and experience of art is subjective – it is up to the individual viewer to like or dislike what she or he experiences. Public art will always be controversial with a lively dialogue involved– which we see as a positive thing as long as this dialogue stays fair and regards the facts.

At this point it might be useful to sum up facts and preconditions: the project resulted from an internationally announced competition by the Public Art Program of the City of Calgary, which was open to artists from all over the world. We applied, got shortlisted and presented our proposal in Calgary to a jury consisting of people from various backgrounds, which finally chose our project.

This project was special and challenging in several ways. First – the given site was not a plaza in the middle of downtown where everybody would expect a public sculpture– but a trafficated bridge in the suburbs of Calgary. The artwork had to be incorporated into the functional structure of the road and bridge – i.e. it could not be a freestanding sculpture but needed to be part of the bridge or infrastructure. These circumstances led to a solution that might be unusual for an artwork at the first glance. Our proposal replaced an existing streetlamp with a big circle which kept the original lightfixture in the exact same position as before. As the bridge is in proximity to the highway and the airport it was the intention to create an artwork that functions as a landmark from afar and is able to give the site a recognizable visual identity.

A kind of irritation seems even to derive from us being an artist group from abroad. We would like to point out that over 80 % of the overall project budget for this project stayed in Calgary, as the fabricators are a local company based in the city of Calgary. We would also like to put emphasis on the fact that the same company has produced several of our monumental sculptures during the latest 5 years that have been installed in other locations worldwide - outside of Canada. So even if we were commissioned a work in Singapore or Munich – the major part of these budgets were spent and stayed in Calgary.

Part of the reaction seems to target public art in general – and question its necessity. The City of Calgary has a great public art program and has every reason to be proud of that. We are aware that changes to a familiar environment can be irritating to some people and spur issues of discussion and controversy. Nevertheless we hope that once the infected discussions have calmed down and people get more used to the sculpture, Calgarians might be able to enjoy the work. That was what we intended in the first place – and we would be very happy if that is going to be the case in the future.

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